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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses management strategies based on feminist social psychological principles, applies them to the administration of small colleges, and suggests their effectiveness for dealing with intelligent and independent faculty members. The principles cited are: (1) individuals are located in a sociological context that creates differences in perspectives; (2) peoples' perspectives are a function of their power in a sociocultural structure; (3) people are active agents who use diverse behaviors and strategies to cope and grow; (4) multiple perspectives are more useful than dichotomous ones; and (5) connection is the basis for human interaction and collaboration. The management strategies derived from these principles include: analyze social context to focus on structural change rather than on individual behavior; avoid attributions to individual personalities; be aware of environmental stresses which may produce dysfunctional behaviors; avoid oversimplification and false dichotomies; and use participatory and consensus-building decision making. These management styles are likened to traditional governance in 19th century colleges, in which a president was a member of the faculty. Difficulties and challenges in applying these principles and strategies are also addressed such as when a different style of leadership is perceived as a lack of leadership. A chart summarizes principles, strategies, and difficulties. (BF)

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Managing a Small Cat House, or, Applications of Feminist Social Psychology to Academic Administration in Small Colleges

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An old joke among higher education administrators is that managing faculty is like herding cats: even if one can get the group to move in one direction, many will veer off in other directions or circle around aimlessly. As an academic affairs administrators, I argue that, given the feline tendencies of faculty members, (i.e., independent, intelligent, principled, and stubborn), management based on feminist social psychological principles is both effective and fair, in an application of feminist principles for psychology curricula that were developed at the National Conference on Feminist Training and Practice (Chin & Russo, in press). The principles on which my analysis are based are that 1) individuals are located in a sociocultural context that creates differences in perspectives based on cultural, racial, and other dimensions; 2) peoples' perspectives are a function of their power in a sociocultural structure; 3) people are active agents who use diverse behaviors and strategies to cope and grow within various environments; 4) multiple perspectives are more useful than dichotomous ones, which are both ineffective and unrealistic; and, 5) connection is the basis for human interaction and collaboration is important.

These principles lead to a number of management strategies.

Analyze the social context in which peoples' behavior occurs and focus on appropriate structural change to facilitate change in individual behavior, rather than the reverse.

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Avoid attributions to individual personalities and understand that power relationships that are involved in most situations. Understand that as an administrator one is perceived as having a certain kind of power that influences how one's actions are understood. Most administrators probably feel they have less power than faculty members think they do, so it is easy to forget the nature of the relationship.

Academic reward systems sometimes encourage behavior which may seem dysfunctional or unhealthy, but which may represent ways to cope with environments that do not permit more seemingly health ways of behaving.

People in academic environments love to set up false dichotomies and straw arguments, which inevitably involve oversimplifying and falsely dichotomizing arguments. Complex problems need to be treated as just that, complex.

Participatory and consensus-based decision making is far more satisfying for participants and produces results and plans that people can buy into more readily.

These approaches also pose challenges.

Analyzing social context is difficult when one is dealing with individuals whose day to day behavior is not visible to you. It's hard to get sufficient evidence to assess the contextual features of situations.

There are times when people behave badly and have to be told so, particularly when people who have higher status are abusive in their interactions with people with less status, such as tenured faculty members taking advantage of nontenured faculty members.

I'm human, too, and I get annoyed at people, especially when they attack me or others personally. It is sometimes very difficult not to let that emotion color one's analysis of events.

Avoiding simplistic analyses leads to complex solutions, but people tend to look for administrators to "fix things" easily and may criticize or fail to understand complicated solutions.

Others won't always "play fair" and may undermine attempts at consensus building. *Consensus building takes time and can be frustratingly slow* and not be seen as decisive. People who don't understand that what you are doing is deliberate may perceive you as *not being capable of "real leadership"* and you may have to educate people about the nature of leadership as well as what you are doing, which may be distracting from the real tasks.

The advantages are worth the difficulties. These strategies are effective and produce long-term change, rather than superficial tinkering with programs. The opportunity to encourage talented people, in a manner which is consistent with the mission of educational institutions to promote enlightenment and political and personal goals is very satisfying.

Furthermore, I would argue that this kind of management is optimal for dealing with people with feline tendencies. Leadership styles which direct without consultation and fail to take into account the contextual influences and complexity of issues are perceived as insulting by intelligent people who chose to work in academic settings for the collegiality of working with other interesting people. I would argue that directive leadership styles have contributed to the adversarial relationships between administrators

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and faculty members which is pervasive on our campuses. Interestingly, feminist management styles hearken back to the tradition of faculty governance that was established at colleges in the 19th century, and which small liberal arts colleges like mine still tend to emulate, in which the President was one of the faculty and made decisions for the sake of the institution with them. Without adopting the patrician and patriarchal features of those colleges, perhaps a return to the past would not be a bad thing.

Reference

Chin, J. L., & Russo, N. F. (in press). Feminist curriculum development: Principles and resources. In J. Worell and N. Johnson (Eds.), Feminist visions: New directions for research and practice. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Principles *	Derivative Management Strategies	Challenges and Difficulties
1. Individuals are located in a sociocultural context that creates differences in perspectives based on cultural, racial, and other dimensions.	Analyze the social context in which peoples' behavior occurs and focus on appropriate structural change to facilitate change in individual behavior, rather than the reverse.	*Analyzing social context is difficult when one is dealing with individuals whose day to day behavior is not visible to you. It's hard to get sufficient evidence to assess contextual features of situations.*
2. Peoples' perspectives are a function of their power in a sociocultural structure.	Avoid attributions to individual personalities and understand that power relationships that are involved in most situations. Understand that as an administrator one is perceived as having a certain kind of power that influences how one's actions are understood. Most administrators probably feel they have less power than faculty members think they do, so it is easy to forget the nature of the relationship.	*There are times when people behave badly and have to be told so, particularly when people who have higher status are abusive in their interactions with people with less status, such as tenured faculty members taking advantage of nontenured faculty members.* *I'm human, too, and I get annoyed at people, especially when they attack me or others personally. It is sometimes very difficult not to let that emotion color one's analysis of events.*
3. People are active agents who use diverse behaviors and strategies to cope and grow within various environments.	Academic reward systems sometimes encourage behavior which may seem dysfunctional or unhealthy, but which may represent ways to cope with environments that do not permit more seemingly health ways of behaving.	*Administrators who want to empower other people to make change walk a fine line between encouraging and instigating, which may create reactance or be dangerous politically.*

* Derived from: Chin, J. L., & Russo, N. F. (in press). Feminist curriculum development: Principles and resources. In J. Worell and N. Johnson (Eds.), Feminist visions: New directions for research and practice. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Principles *	Derivative Management Strategies	Challenges and Difficulties
4. Multiple perspectives are more useful than dichotomous ones, which are both ineffective and unrealistic.	People in academic environments love to set up false dichotomies and straw arguments, which inevitably involve oversimplifying and falsely dichotomizing arguments. Complex problems need to be treated as just that, complex.	*Avoiding simplistic analyses leads to complex solutions, but people tend to look for administrators to "fix things" easily.*
5. Connection is the basis for human interaction and collaboration is important.	Participatory and consensus-based decision making is far more satisfying for participants and produces results and plans that people can buy into more readily.	*Others won't always "play fair" and may undermine attempts at consensus building. Consensus building takes time and can be frustratingly slow and not be seen as decisive. People who don't understand that what you are doing is deliberate may perceive you as not being capable of "real leadership" and you may have to educate people about the nature of leadership as well as what you are doing, which may be distracting from the real tasks.*

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